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**Fellowship Defeats Dispute
As BWA Congress Emphasis**

By Jim Newton

TORONTO (BP)--Despite demonstrations, pickets, protest rallies and news conferences that degenerated into debates over a dispute between Russian Baptists, more than 20,000 Baptists from around the world devoted their major attention to celebrating 75 years of fellowship during the 14th Baptist World Congress.

There were several indications that the 75th anniversary session ushered in a new era of internationalization for the Baptist World Alliance.

The 19,814 registered delegates to the congress meeting at Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto elected Gerhard Claas, BWA associate secretary for Europe and former German Baptist executive, as the organization's new general secretary.

Earlier, during the pre-congress session, the Alliance General Council elected eight executive staff members from five countries who speak English and eight other languages in a determined attempt to develop a "multi-lingual, multi-cultural" staff.

Duke K. McCall, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., who was elected president of the Alliance for a five-year term, said in an interview after his election that he regretted that the Soviet Union question had become the dominant news coming out of the congress.

"A far bigger issue is the emerging leadership role of Baptists from Third World countries," said McCall, who praised the "first class biblical scholarship" of speakers from Third World countries on the program.

Although some long-time Baptist observers noted that previous congress programs have been dominated by North Americans and Europeans, this was not the case in this session.

Bible study sessions were led each day by Baptist leaders from Taiwan, Nigeria, Brazil and Australia.

Official delegates came to the congress from more than 85 countries. When asked what had meant the most to them, most responded, "the fellowship with Baptists from other countries."

The entire Wednesday afternoon session was devoted to a "World Fellowship Celebration" at Toronto's Exhibition Place. The session was compared to a "gigantic family reunion" with Baptists from around the world exchanging souvenirs and getting acquainted.

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For most, the highlight of the week-long series of meetings was the final session when evangelist Billy Graham issued a call to commitment to worldwide evangelism, and when Baptists carrying the flags of 120 nations paraded around the arena to the platform where they spoke in their native language the congress theme, "Celebrating Christ's Presence in the Spirit."

When the flag of the Soviet Union was presented and the Russian delegate voiced the congress theme, thunderous applause broke out. Only applause for the United States was louder than that for the Soviet Union.

The congress came to a climactic close with the singing of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus by a 2,500 voice choir and orchestra directed by Cliff Barrows of the Billy Graham evangelistic team. Then the more than 19,000 delegates overflowing the arena joined hands and sang, "Bless Be the Tie that Binds, Our Hearts in Christian Love."

But it was the dispute between Baptists from the Soviet Union that consistently drew the headlines.

From beginning to end, pickets outside the Maple Leaf Gardens protested the presence of Russian Baptists and charged that several members of the official Russian Baptist delegation were agents of the Soviet KGB. The pickets were organized by Carl McIntyre, president of the International Council of Christian Churches, who staged a protest rally at Jarvis Collegiate Institute.

Although there was no connection between the two groups, Reform Baptist leader Georgi Vins, exiled to the United States after eight years in Russian prisons, staged another conference called "The Voice of the Persecuted Church" at the Harbour Castle Hilton Convention Center.

Vins and Alexei Bichkov, general secretary of the official All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in Russia, were principal figures in the dispute that raged behind the scenes and in the news media every day of the congress.

Vins said he came to Toronto to "wake up Christians in the West" to the extent of persecution of Christians in the Soviet Union, but Bichkov charged in a news conference that Vins came to create division and divisiveness. Bichkov claimed that charges that KGB agents are members of the official delegation are "insulting" and "stupid."

In news conferences following their elections, both McCall and Claas refused to take sides in the disputes between the two Russian Baptist factions, calling instead for reconciliation between the Russian Baptists.

Vins, who registered as an official delegate and attended the news conference for McCall on Friday with full press accreditation, said in an interview afterwards that he would like to talk and pray with the Soviet delegation, but he said that would put them in an untenable position because they had permission from the government to attend the congress and had to answer to Soviet officials for their actions and pronouncements during the week.

The next day during a meeting of the BWA General Council, Bichkov and two other members of the official Soviet delegation presented a statement protesting the registration of Vins as an official delegate. They said his registration was a violation of the BWA Constitution which limits attendance to representatives of Baptist bodies which have been approved for membership by the General Council. The General Council, however, took no action on the Russians' protest.

When asked by reporters why the BWA had taken no action condemning Soviet aggression in Afghanistan or persecution of Christians in Communist countries, both McCall and Claas insisted that the BWA had condemned violation of human rights, religious liberty and aggression in every country in the world.

There was a minimum of business conducted by the 18,000 Baptists attending the congress plenary session. When time ran out during a business session, the delegates voted to approve one resolution praising the hospitality of Toronto and Canadian Baptists and referred seven other resolutions to the General Council for action.

A resolution on religious freedom and human rights called on governments of the world "to grant religious freedom for all peoples" and urged the "cessation of all discrimination" against those who practice religions other than those approved in their countries.

Other resolutions encouraged ratification and signing of the SALT II Treaty and other negotiations toward world peace and disarmament, urged response to the world hunger crisis and called on churches and governments to conserve oil and other energy resources.

In a separate resolution submitted by the BWA Women's Department, the General Council urged the Liberian government to release Mrs. W.R. Tolbert, widow of the former president of the Republic of Liberia, and to allow her to emigrate to the United States. In a memorial service earlier, tribute was paid to Tolbert as a former president of the Baptist World Alliance.

The 1980 Baptist World Congress ended without making a decision on where the 1985 meeting would be held. The General Council referred the question to a smaller committee for a later decision after declining to approve a proposal to meet in Honolulu. The congress would be held somewhere in Asia if a traditional "rotation" system of meeting sites is followed.

In separate sessions, both the Women's Department and Men's Department elected new leaders.

Mrs. Kerstin Ruden, 65, of Vallsta, Sweden, president of the European Baptist Women's Union, was elected president of the BWA Women's Department, succeeding Mrs. R.L. Mathis of Waco, Texas, who has held the position for the past 10 years.

The BWA Men's Department elected Lee Satterfield, an optometrist from Alta Vista, Va., as its new chairman, succeeding Stephen Steeves of Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada.

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BWA General Council
Drops Vins Complaint

By Al Shackleford

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TORONTO (BP)--In closing day business the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance accepted its 120th member body; passed seven resolutions which had been referred to it by the congress; and declined to act on a request that the registration of Georgi Vins be negated.

The council met on the closing day of the 14th Baptist World Congress meeting at Maple Leaf Gardens. Registration for the five-day event reached 19,800, making it the largest congress in the BWA's 75-year history.

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The Luzon Baptist Convention, located in the Philippines, was accepted by the General Council, raising the number of member bodies to 120 in 85 nations and dependencies.

The council approved seven resolutions referred to them by the congress on Friday when time ran short. The resolutions dealt with evangelism, religious freedom and human rights, family life, world peace and disarmament, world hunger, refugees, and ecology.

Alexei Bichkov, general secretary of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians/Baptists in the Soviet Union, called on the General Council for the "abolishment of Vins' registration as an official delegate and also on withdrawal of his press accreditation right."

Vins was released last year from a Soviet prison after serving eight years for violation of governmental restrictions on church activities. He had been holding a conference on the persecuted church in competition with the Baptist World Congress.

Vins had called the congress office for permission to attend a news conference for the new BWA president, Duke K. McCall. Vins was incorrectly informed that in order to register as a reporter, he would have to register as a congress delegate. He then sent the \$35 registration fee with a friend.

In his statement to the General Council, Bichkov said Vins' registration was a direct violation of the BWA's Constitution and Bylaws. "Vins is not a citizen of the USSR and has no rights to represent any Baptists outside the membership of the BWA," Bichkov said, labeling Vins' Toronto meeting as "anti-congress."

McCall agreed that the constitution and bylaws should be followed, but noted that it is "contrary to our Baptist nature to close the door to anybody. We recognize you (Bichkov) and the All-Union Council as our brothers."

Gerhard Claas, new BWA general secretary, noted that Vins had been invited as a visitor by Robert Denny, retiring general secretary. Claas stated that visitors are welcome to attend, but not to participate. He suggested that the Washington office do a study on the visitor-delegate relationship. Several council members pointed out that the registration procedures are very lax.

During the discussion no motion was ever made, and McCall apparently did not consider Bichkov's statement as a motion.

The members of the General Council did express themselves on the matter, when they gave scattered applause to a statement by David Russell of England that "we share the regret that Bichkov has expressed."

The General Council also declined to approve Honolulu, Hawaii, as the site of the 1985 Baptist World Congress. According to a tradition of rotating meetings among Europe, Asia and the Americas, the next congress should be in Asia.

However, Betty Smith of the BWA staff reported that all other possibilities in Asia could not be considered because of lack of facilities or visa problems.

The council voted to refer the problem to a small committee, to be named by McCall, with the understanding that every possible site be considered.

In other action the General Council tabled a recommendation from the Commission on Doctrine and Inter-Church Cooperation that a Baptist-Roman Catholic dialogue be undertaken. The council decided to delay consideration until more information concerning the project was available.

The General Council voted to support a resolution passed by the Women's Department meeting, expressing concern and good wishes for Mrs. W.R. Tolbert. The women's resolution urged Liberian government officials to free the widow, who has been under house arrest since the death of her husband.

Tolbert, a former BWA president, was president of Liberia until he was assassinated during a military coup in that nation last spring.

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Christianity in Asia Faces
Oriental Faith Competition

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TORONTO (BP)--Christianity in Asia faces competition with oriental religions which are reviving as a part of growing nationalism, a Chinese pastor-educator told Baptist World Alliance delegates.

"Christianity is only one faith among many in Asia," said Lien Hwa Chow, a Baptist pastor and seminary professor from Taiwan. Many former adherents of those other Asian faiths were among the 19,000 Baptists from around the globe meeting in Toronto for the Baptist World Congress, held every five years.

Twenty-five years ago, Lien said, the oriental religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, primitive animism and others were said to be dying. Today that is no longer true.

Leaders of developing nations find it politically wise to follow their own national religions, he said. Developing nations seeking technology from the West also fear losing their roots, so turn to their own faiths, he added.

Lien urged the delegates to root their missionary efforts in the local setting, to make their work indigenous, though he warned against going into syncretism, or blending of Christianity with other religious and cultural practices and beliefs.

In other matters the delegates approved routine changes in the Baptist World Alliance constitution and held a brief memorial service in memory of eight key Alliance workers who have died since the last meeting five years ago.

Singled out for special recognition was the late Theodore F. Adams, Southern Baptist educator and minister from Virginia and North Carolina who served as Alliance president from 1955 to 1960.

Another notable name mentioned in the memorial service was William R. Tolbert Jr., the Liberian president assassinated recently. Tolbert was president and vice president of the Baptist World Alliance, and never hesitated to mention his church affiliation.

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